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## President's Notes

James R. Stark

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*"While ethical decisions may not always be easy, the choices and standards are clear. It is up to each of us to meet those standards—our nation deserves no less."*

## President's Notes

To be persuasive, we must be believable;  
To be believable, we must be credible;  
To be credible, we must be truthful.

Edward R. Murrow

**E**ACH YEAR THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE sponsors a Professional Ethics Conference for our students. In the past we have taken as our theme such topics as "The Ethics of International Intervention" and "Ethics Revisited: The Individual and the Organization." This year we took a slightly different tack and explored the subject of "Personal Ethics and the Military Service: The

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Rear Admiral Stark was commissioned in 1965 at the U.S. Naval Academy, studied at the University of Vienna as a Fulbright Scholar, and earned a doctorate in political science at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. He has served on the Navy Staff, the National Security Council staff, and as Executive Director of the Chief of Naval Operations Executive Panel. His sea service has included command of USS *Julius A. Furer* (FFG 6), USS *Leahy* (CG 16), and, from 1994 to 1995, the Nato Standing Naval Force Atlantic, deployed in the Adriatic Sea. He assumed the duties of President of the Naval War College in June 1995.

Character of Readiness." The symposium was not intended simply to lecture people on a code of ethical behavior or why it is important in leadership. Each student present is already a leader—all are already members of a profession which prizes ethical, honorable behavior above all else. Instead, we challenged our participants to consider not only their personal ethics but also their ethical responsibilities as military leaders and the relationship of ethics to the whole range of issues encompassed within the term "readiness." Based on the events of the past few weeks and the quick response times required in military actions around the world today, "readiness" is a topic which is both timely and important.

Questions such as "What is readiness?" or "How do we measure true readiness?" appear with increasing regularity in the press as well as scholarly publications, as part of the national reevaluation of the role of the military in the post-cold war world. Simultaneously, we have entered a period of national belt-tightening, in which requirements for budget cutting are matched by action, and funding for every program is sharply reviewed and questioned. More than ever, Congress and the public demand—rightly—that the significant national treasure and talent devoted to America's military forces must result in real "readiness."

We are the stewards of the critical national resources which the services currently possess; we are the planners of our military resources for the future. In dealing with readiness issues, we must never forget that our standards of professional ethics are the foundation for the trust and confidence of those we lead. We must never allow ethical principles to be sacrificed for the sake of expediency. We all know what these principles should be—the highest standards of personal and professional integrity. Yet we also know that from time to time members of our profession do not measure up to these standards.


At some point in their careers, most officers are confronted by situations which present ethical dilemmas and seem to require balancing personal standards of integrity against the perceived (as opposed to the stated) expectations of our service. A recruiter may be tempted to bring in marginally qualified personnel to meet his quotas. An operations officer may opt for larger numbers of less demanding exercises to inflate his training statistics. A commanding officer may wish to delay reporting a materiel problem to avoid the appearance of his ship or squadron being less than fully ready. Each of these is an example of the need to choose "the hard right over the easy wrong."

The success of our mission to defend the nation depends on how we, as professionals, make these decisions and exercise our duties and responsibilities. Our success is inextricably linked to how the armed forces are perceived by the public we are sworn to serve. We currently enjoy an unusual degree of public trust, earned by our hard work and that of our predecessors. As the Secretary of

## 6 Naval War College Review

the Navy stated in one of our Conference readings, "Our role in setting and adhering to the highest ethical standards for ourselves and our services plays a crucial role in ensuring this continued trust and the continuing success of our mission."

Readiness is a key issue which tests our entitlement to this public trust. Few issues are more closely related to national security and the lives and safety of those we lead and protect. Readiness has a nasty habit of being tested by the real world, which is no respecter of manipulated statistics, disingenuous definitions, self-justifications, or expedient shortcuts. While ethical decisions may not always be easy, the choices and standards are clear. It is up to each of us to meet those standards—our nation deserves no less.

  
J.R. STARK  
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy  
President, Naval War College

